

OUR BELOVED DEAD

By
The Rev'd S. C. Hughson,
O.H.C.



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IT HAS been said that "every heresy is the intellectual vengeance of some suppressed truth." Ever since the Reformation period, members of the Anglican Church have had withheld from them the full truth concerning the condition of the faithful dead and of the Saints in Heaven. The result has been that throughout the Anglican world there have for many generations been everywhere confused and anxious questionings about our beloved Dead. The instinct of man's heart refuses to forget those whom we have "loved long since and lost awhile." It demands to know something of their condition, what relations they maintain with us, what they can do for us and we for them.

The Catholic Church has a perfectly clear and exact answer to all these inquiries, but for many generations a timid silence has been maintained by some of our teachers and theologians which, in certain cases, has really amounted to a definite suppression of the revealed truth of God, even in some instances to a perversion of the actual letter of Holy Scripture.

The suppressed truth has been terribly avenged. We find men everywhere propounding questions, grotesque and pathetic, concerning their beloved dead, and when those to whom they have the right to go for instruction, refuse to give them

the Church's truth, they seek unto familiar spirits, and run to necromancy and spiritism, reaching in an illegitimate way after that knowledge and comfort which is their right, and which has been denied them.

The remedy for the heresy of spiritism is the Church's complete teaching concerning the Communion of Saints. What then does the Church teach concerning the Faithful Departed?

Before giving a reply to this question, let us first settle in our minds who are referred to when the term *Faithful Departed* is used. It means those who died in the Faith and unity of the Church of God, not being in mortal sin.

When this statement is made, the further question arises—By what sure method can we judge whether a certain soul is lost or saved, i. e., whether it is, or is not, among the Faithful Departed? There is no such method of judging. The Holy Spirit has revealed to us that there is a certain condition in which, if a man dies, he is lost; but what individuals are in that condition, no man can tell. We have the right, therefore, to give the benefit of every doubt to the soul that has passed from this world.

A man may have lived a life of wilful indifference to God; another may have lived a life of the deepest evil; another may have been a blasphemer of God and His Holy Religion. But if, even in the last conscious moment of his life, facing the awful realities of the Judgment, that soul has turned to God with sorrow, He who said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out," will receive it,

and it will find its place at the last amongst those who are counted worthy to rejoice in the eternal vision of God.

Again, there are those who have rejected the revealed truth of God, who have persisted in false doctrine or heresy, and died in that unbelief.

But here again the quality of God's mercy is not strained. The Church has ever taught that such souls, if they have acted conscientiously, believing that the doctrine they held was the truth, will not be condemned on account of an intellectual error. We have all known devout, God-fearing persons who all their life long have denied the Faith. But they have not wilfully and knowingly rejected the truth. They have been sincere, and have sought to live up to the light they had. The Church holds that these souls will not be condemned of God.

In any of these cases, we give the individual the benefit of the doubt, although where there has been no formal communion with the Catholic Church, she reserves the right to say who shall, and who shall not, be formally prayed for at her altars. But so far as our individual action is concerned, the Church leaves us free to consider these souls as included, by the mercy of God, in the Communion of Saints, and to number them among the Faithful Departed.

Let us now go back to our first enquiry. What does the Church teach concerning the condition of the souls of the Faithful Departed?

(1) It teaches that the Blessed Dead are alive.

Our Lord Himself taught this to the unbelieving Sadducees who denied spiritual existences, and proved it from the Scripture where God, speaking of the Departed, said, "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the Living" (St. Mark 12:26-27). He also declared that "Abraham rejoiced to see my day (that is the day of His coming into the world); and he saw it and was glad" (St. John 8:56).

(2) The Church teaches that the Blessed Dead are conscious.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, our Lord says that Lazarus was "comforted," from which it would necessarily follow that he was conscious (St. Luke 16:25). St. Peter tells us that our Lord, between His death and Resurrection "preached unto the spirits in prison," which would have been impossible had not those spirits been possessed of the conscious use of their faculties (I Peter 3:19).

(3) The Church teaches that the Blessed Dead still remember conditions on earth.

Our Lord in the same parable we have quoted, narrates that Abraham said to Dives, "Son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy

good things and likewise Lazarus evil things." If a lost soul could recall conditions on earth, it were monstrous to suppose that the Blessed Dead should have the memory of their earthly life blotted out. Abraham, in the same parable is described as having a knowledge of what occurred on earth. He knew all about Moses and the prophets, and about Dives' brothers. There can be no doubt in the mind of any man who believes in the Church and the Bible, that his own Holy Dead enjoy a similar knowledge.

(4) The Church teaches that the Blessed Dead are acquainted with our present life and needs.

Abraham is showed by our Lord's words to have rejoiced to witness our Lord's entrance upon His human life in this world. The same patriarch is represented by our Lord as knowing of the kind of life that Dives and Lazarus had lived, their needs and their general condition.

The Epistle to the Hebrews describes the saints as being the continual spectators of our life-struggles in this world. The eleventh chapter of this Epistle contains what is substantially the Kalendar of the Saints of the Jewish Church, beginning with righteous Abel, and coming down practically to the author's own day. After narrating their virtues, he goes on to say, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us . . . run the race that is set before us."

The figure used here is taken from the Roman

athletic games, the spectators on their elevated seats around the great arena, watching the races taking place on the course below. The "cloud of witnesses" are the Saints who have just been enumerated. Even as conservative a commentator as Dean Alford declares that we must conclude "that they who have entered into heavenly rest are conscious of what passes amongst ourselves. Any interpretation short of this leaves the passage without point."

(5) The Church teaches that there are various degrees of perfection amongst the Blessed Dead.

St. Paul comparing the Saints with the stars of heaven, declares that "one star differeth from another star in glory" (I Cor. 15:41).

(6) The Church teaches that the Souls of the Blessed Dead grow and advance in perfection.

St. Paul teaches that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). The "day of Jesus Christ" is the day of His final coming. It is clear that the work of the Spirit, guiding, teaching, cleansing, will go on until our Lord's coming, when the dead will be raised, and "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), will be reunited to their bodies, and they will have the perfect consummation, in both body and soul of that bliss of Heaven which previous to their resurrection they could enjoy but partially.

(7) The Church teaches that in the next world the Blessed Dead are cleansed.

It cannot be said of any man that he is perfect at the moment of death; and death is not a sacrament of cleansing and perfecting. Unless there is an opportunity after death of being cleansed and prepared, there is no hope of heaven, for it is revealed in Scripture that nothing can enter that Holy City that defileth (Rev. 21:27).

Even where all sin has been forgiven, the effects remain in the way of moral stain, weakness and infirmity. As Bishop Forbes says, (*X X X I X Articles*, p. 346), "We have in us passive bad habits, unheavenly tastes, which the soul contracts through sin, and which remain after the guilt of sin is remitted, and these must be removed before our entrance into heaven, into which nothing that is impure or imperfect may enter."

Because of these things every soul needs cleansing, and the Church has ever taught the existence of an Intermediate State into which only the souls who pass out of this world in a condition of grace, can enter, and in which they are purged. This state is called Purgatory from the fact that it is a place of purging.

Purgatory might be called the ante-room of Heaven. No soul that leaves this world in a state of unrepented mortal sin can enter Purgatory any more than it can enter Heaven itself. This blessed place of cleansing and preparation is reserved only for those who are saved. It is not a place of

second probation, for there is no such thing. Dwelling there in the hand of God in their abode of peace where no torment can touch them, nor care corrode, are the souls who, although weak and sinful, yet chose God in this world, and tried earnestly, and to the end, to love and serve Him. They can never again fall from Him. The grace they have received they can now never lose.

"In that great cloister's stillness and seclusion,
By guardian angels led,
Safe from temptation, safe from sin's pollution,
She lives, whom we call dead."

(8) The Church teaches that the process of purgation involves suffering.

Almost without exception the Fathers of the early Church used the figure of fire when speaking of the instrument of purification of the soul. Purgatory, however, is never to be thought of as a place or state of gloom and darkness where the souls of those who will finally enter heaven are tortured, as it were, by tormenting flames. This was the popular Roman teaching condemned by our Church in Article XXII, and it is only fair to say it was also condemned implicitly by the decree of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, which lays down as the required belief only "that there is a Purgatory and that the souls there detained are relieved by the suffrages of the Faithful, but chiefly by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar."

St. Catherine of Genoa has stated the true Catholic doctrine in her *Treatise on Purgatory*, a tiny

work in its compass, but profound in its depth of truth and comfort. She says, "It would be impossible to find any joy comparable to that of a soul in Purgatory except the joy of the Blessed in Paradise, a joy which goes on increasing day by day as God more and more flows in upon the soul, which He does abundantly in proportion as every hindrance to His entrance is consumed away."

Again St. Catherine says: "The overflowing love of God bestows upon the souls in Purgatory a happiness great beyond expression. But then this happiness does not in the least diminish the pain, rather the pain is constituted by this love finding itself impeded. The more perfect the love of which God makes the soul capable, the greater the pain. In this manner the souls in Purgatory at the same time experience the greatest happiness and the most excessive pain; and the one does not prevent the other."

John Henry Newman has interpreted this doctrine for English-speaking Christians in his oft-quoted poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*, where he describes the judgment of the faithful soul who has been cleansed from guilt by the Precious Blood, but who is smitten with the intense pang of the consciousness of wrongs done to our Lord, and of the imperfections which remain as the result of past sins.

The pains of Purgatory, as he describes them, are those which every soul who loves our Lord can understand, if not indeed in some measure anticipate, as it contemplates His strong and per-

severing love in relation to the wilful, and often repeated, wounds its offences have inflicted upon His Sacred Heart.

"It is the face of the Incarnate God
Shall smite thee with that keen and subtle pain;
And yet the memory which it leaves will be
A sovereign febrifuge to heal the wound;
And yet withal it will the wound provoke,
And aggravate and widen it the more.
When, then, (if such thy lot), thou seest thy Judge,
The sight of Him will kindle in thy heart
All tender, gracious, reverential thoughts.
Thou wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him,
And feel as though thou couldst but pity Him,
That one so sweet should e'er have placed Himself
At disadvantage such, as to be used
So vilely by a being so vile as thee.
There is a pleading in His pensive eyes,
Will pierce thee to the quick, and trouble thee.
And thou wilt hate and loathe thyself; for, though
Now sinless, thou wilt feel that thou hast sinned,
As never didst thou feel; and wilt desire
To slink away, and hide thee from His sight;
And yet wilt have a longing eye to dwell
Within the beauty of His countenance.
And these two pains, so counter and so keen,—
The longing for Him, when thou seest Him not;
The shame of self at thought of seeing Him,—
Will be thy veriest, sharpest purgatory."

Such are the pains of Purgatory, pains, a belief in which is not only consistent with, but required by, our knowledge of the processes of readjustment, perfecting and healing in every sphere of human life, whether it be moral, mental, physical, or spiritual.

A brace on the twisted leg of a child corrects the deformity, but causes pain in the process. The correction of bad habits of mind or of will

must be accomplished by suffering. To destroy "unheavenly tastes," and to form tastes and desires that are good and holy,—all this requires effort, discipline, the breaking of the old and the knitting up of the new; and none of this can be done without pain. Every one who in this life has made a serious and continued effort to grow in holiness, knows that it demands sacrifice and pain. There is not one reason that can be adduced to make us think that death works so great a change in human nature as to make this no longer necessary in the next world.

The late William E. Gladstone put it well when he said, "The Christian dead are in a progressive state,—a process of discipline, happy indeed in its results, but of which we have no right to assert . . . that the redeeming and consummating process will be accomplished without an admixture of salutary and accepted pain."

(9) The Church teaches that it is both the privilege and the duty of Christians to pray for the Blessed Dead.

There would seem to be no doubt that our Lord and His Apostles habitually prayed for the dead. The Jews regularly used such prayers in their public services and our Lord who attended those services must often have joined in them. If the practice had been wrong it is certain that He would have rebuked it. So far from rebuking it, He expressly commanded His disciples to submit themselves to the teaching of the synagogue. "The scribes and Pharisees," He said, "sit in Moses'

seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do" (St. Matt. 23:3). Among these observances were prayers for the dead. There seems therefore to be no escape from the conclusion that our Lord commanded His disciples to use prayer for the departed.

But whether or not we are justified in making so strong a statement as that our Lord commanded prayers for the dead, there can be no question that his disciples pursued this practice. They took part in such prayers in the Temple and synagogue worship. St. Paul prayed for his dear friend Onesiphorus. "The Lord grant unto him that he find mercy of the Lord in that day," he says. The context would seem to make it clear that Onesiphorus was dead at the time St. Paul wrote. This opinion is approved by such weighty authorities as Bishop Jeremy Taylor, Dr. Pusey, Vernon Staley, Bishop Forbes, Bishop Gore and a multitude of others.

"The early Liturgies of the Church which traced back to the Apostolic time, bear witness to the public teaching of the most remote antiquity, are unanimous in this respect"—that is, regarding prayers for the dead. (Bishop Forbes, *Articles*, p. 312).

Tertullian, who was born about fifty years after the death of St. John, and who is our chief authority for the customs of the Church in the first century after the Apostles, speaks of prayers for the Dead as the ordinary practice of Christians.

There has never been any question that from the second century until some time after the

Reformation they were used everywhere and by everyone. Subsequent to the Reformation great pressure from protestant quarters was brought to bear upon the authorities to eliminate them altogether from our Anglican formularies, but without success. In our revised American Prayer Book direct prayers for the dead occur in five places,—in the Prayer for the Church in the Communion Office, in the Collect for the Eucharist at a burial, in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, and twice in the funeral Office.

The American Church has also inserted definite prayers for the dead in her official hymnal. In *The Hymnal* occurs the ancient prayer, "Grant them Thine eternal rest." This was adopted by the General Convention in place of the former garbled version, "Grant *us* Thine eternal rest."

(10) The Church teaches that definite benefits accrue to the Blessed Dead as the result of our prayers for them.

We have seen how souls must be purified through some kind of suffering. Our prayers bring soothing relief from these inevitable pains, and hasten the time when the soul, perfectly restored in Christ, will cease to suffer the disciplinary process of conformity to Him.

The particular ways in which this comes to pass are known from the language of the prayers for the Departed which the Church recommends

to us. St. Paul prayed that St. Onesiphorus might "find mercy." So, we are taught that our prayers secure the mercy of God for them. Mercy is a quality that is exercised only in cases of misery. This misery is that which a soul in union with God, loving Him with all its energy, must feel at being kept back from the perfect vision of Him by its imperfections and "unheavenly tastes." The exercise of this mercy for which we pray, will bring that cleansing and purification which will enable the Blessed Dead to see God.

Many of the ancient Liturgies prayed that the souls of the Departed might be "refreshed," or that they might have "rest." It is this last expression that was used in the prayer found in the hymn the Church appoints for our use in Advent—"Grant them Thine eternal rest."

The ancient *Requiem Aeternam* prays, "Grant them, O Lord, eternal rest and let perpetual light shine upon them." Another form asks, "May the souls of the Faithful through the mercy of God rest in peace."

These, then, are the blessings which the practice of the Church, expressed either formally or by a generally approved custom, recommends us to ask for the Blessed Dead,—cleansing, rest, refreshment, light and peace.

(11) The teaching of the Church forbids us to hold that certain kinds of pain, inevitable in the life of probation in the Church on earth, exist in Purgatory.

(a) Probation involves doubt. There is no probation in the next world, and so no torture of doubt can touch the souls of the Faithful Departed. They are certain of their salvation. They know that the eternal state of bliss can now never be forfeited. The souls under the altar cried, "How long, O Lord, how long," but the cry bespeaks the pain of desire, never the pain of doubt.

(b) There never can be the pain of fear as to the future, for at the moment of the passing of the faithful soul, "perfect love had cast out fear."

(c) There can be no pain of temptation. Never again can the soul experience the fearsome onset of Satanic attack. Since it is no longer on trial, it can no longer be tempted.

(d) The souls in Purgatory do not suffer that pain which comes from a longing to get away from this condition. Their wills are wholly conformed to God's will. They rejoice in their pains and would not suffer one pang the less, for they know that nothing comes to them save through the all-loving will of the heavenly Father. To them, as to no others, can be attributed the words of St. Catherine of Siena,—"I love what He loves and hate what He hates, because Love hath made me one with Himself."

(12) The Church teaches that the souls of the Faithful Departed, when cleansed of all imperfection, pass immediately into Heaven, and enjoy the Beatific Vision.

The increase in cleansing, light, refreshment and peace, which we pray God to give our Blessed

Dead, can lead to but one end,—the Vision of God in Paradise. All imperfection being done away, all the darkening effects of sin removed, the soul will pass into Heaven, and there rejoice in the Beatific Vision of the Blessed Trinity.

It must not be thought that the souls of the Faithful do not enter Heaven until after the General Resurrection. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the inhabitants of "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," and tells us that amongst them are "an innumerable company of angels," "the general Assembly and church of the first-born," and "*the spirits of just men made perfect.*" (Heb. 12:22-23). St. John also records in the Book of Revelation seeing the great multitude standing before the throne; and he describes them as those "who are without fault before the throne of God," (Rev. 14:5), that is, those who have been cleansed from every stain of sin,—"*the spirits of just men made perfect.*" All this is said to take place before the final Resurrection, and while the Church on earth is still waging its war against Satan.

Following this Scriptural teaching the spiritual masters of our day repeat this same truth, and the Church, of necessity, places her official seal upon it. One of the hymns which the American Church appoints to be used in our service of the feasts of Saints and Martyrs is that familiar one by Bishop Christopher Wordsworth, "Hark the sound of holy voices." In it this learned and holy prelate describes the present state of the Saints in glory:

"Now they reign in heavenly glory, now they walk in golden light,
Now they drink as from a river holy bliss and infinite;
Love and peace they taste forever, and all truth and knowledge see,
In the Beatific Vision of the Blessed Trinity."

These considerations teach us, as nothing else can, the duty, the privilege, and the joy of praying for our Holy Dead. If our efforts can avail to lift them out of the shadows of Purgatory into the perfect light of God, out of the pain of separation from Him into the bliss of His realized presence, we cannot but recognize prayer for the Dead as a duty to our loved ones; we cannot but claim it as an inestimable privilege which we shall rejoice constantly to exercise.

They have knowledge of what we do on earth. They know our neglect of them, and it grieves their spirits; or they realize the strength and help our prayers, and rejoice in grateful love of us.

Since God has so far lifted the veil that separates our earthly life from that which is beyond, dare we forget our Holy Dead when we pray?

(13) The Faithful who have departed this life, whether they are in Purgatory or Heaven, pray for us.

The Scripture authority for this is abundant in both the Old and New Testaments. In Jer. 15:1, God speaks of Moses and Samuel interceding before Him, and twice in Ezek. 14, Noah, Daniel and Job are mentioned as intercessors of great power with God. In the Book of Revelation similar mention of the prayers of the Saints is oft-

repeated (Rev. 5:8; 6:10). It is not necessary to go further into this subject as no reputable theologian of the Church anywhere in the world has questioned it for fifteen hundred years.

(14) We may ask the prayers of the Blessed Dead whether they be in Purgatory or reigning with Christ in Heaven.

We have seen that they are spectators of our struggles (Heb. 12:1), that they are acquainted with our present life and needs, and that they do actually pray for us. If these things be true, it would be unnatural not to ask them for the help of their prayers.

This practice has been followed by Christians, as Dr. Darwell Stone has showed in his book, *The Invocation of Saints*, since the second century. From that time until the present there has been an unbroken tradition of asking the prayers of the Saints, and it has been for at least sixteen hundred years the universal practice of every part of the Catholic Church both east and west, the only exception being the protestant element in the Anglican Church.

Discussing this subject of invoking the Saints, our own Bishop Forbes of Edinburgh warns us that "to despise or condemn the universal consent of the whole Church, is a thing perilous to the last degree."

Just as we ask the prayers of God's people on earth, we ask the prayers of God's people who have passed into the life beyond. We pray for them that they might have light and peace and

the bliss of the Beatific Vision in Heaven. They pray for us that we may have those things, temporal and spiritual, which will help us on the way to the same heavenly country. And both we and they pray in that "Communion of Saints," in which we declare our belief as often as we repeat the Apostles' Creed.

(15) The Church teaches that the Blessed Saints, although in Heaven, cannot enjoy the full consummation of their bliss until after the General Resurrection.

We have seen that "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22, 23) enter Heaven immediately. But a disembodied spirit, even though it be made perfect and be in Heaven, is an incomplete being. Man is made up of body and soul, and both are destined for the perfection of the heavenly life. It, therefore, stands to reason, that the body, as well as the soul, is to enjoy God, and that the one cannot have the highest perfection of joy until it is reunited to the other.

The body which on earth shared in the warfare for God and for righteousness is also to have its share in the peace of God in Heaven. This cannot come to pass until the body is raised up in the general Resurrection at the last day. It is this crown of all human joy, this perfection of all human service to God, that we pray for whenever we say, "Thy kingdom come." It was the contemplation of this consummation, so devoutly to be wished, that brought the glad cry from the heart of the Beloved Disciple, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).